Looking Toward The Future

EES 3310/5310

Global Climate Change

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Class #40: Monday April 20 2020

Final Exam

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- Posted to Brightspace
- Due 2:00 PM, Wednesday April 29
- Email it to me
  - Subject line: `EES 3310 Final Exam`
    or `EES 5310 Final Exam`
- 2 essay questions
- Open book, notes, etc.
- As announced Friday, the exam is optional.

Please Complete A Course Evaluation!

Reviewing the Semester

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- What do we know? (Science)
- What can we do? (Technology, Policy)
- How can we decide? (Politics, Ethics)

What Do We Know?

What Do We Know for Sure?

- Human activity is raising CO_2 to the highest levels in more than 800,000 years
- The planet is rapidly warming
- The greenhouse effect is well-established science
- Rising levels of CO_2 make oceans acidic

What Do We Know Very Confidently?

- Human activity is responsible for most observed warming
- CO_2 levels will remain high for thousands of years after we stop burning fossil fuels
- Even if CO_2 stops rising, temperature and sea level will continue to change for centuries

What Do We Know With Some Uncertainty?

- The planet will warm ~3°C for every doubling of CO_2
- Sea-level will rise 1–2 meters this century
- Extreme heat waves will become much more common
- Drought will become more common in much of the world

What Do We Not Know (Much Uncertainty)?

- Regional responses to climate change (e.g., Tennessee)
- Details about drought, rain, floods, etc.
- Tipping points for catastrophe
  - runaway sea-level rise, runaway methane releases, …
- Severe storms (hurricanes, tornadoes, …)
- Impacts on agriculture

What Can We Do?

What Can We Do?

- Mitigate Warming:
  - Efficiency (less energy)
  - Clean energy
- Adaptation
- Geoengineering

How Can We Do it?

- “Top-Down” Policy:
  1. Use science to choose temperature goal
  2. Temperature → GHG concentration
  3. GHG concentration → emissions
  4. Emissions → clean energy requirements
- “Bottom-Up” Policy:
  - What measures are most practical?
  - How can we combine them into coherent policy?

How Can We Decide?

Problems for Politics

- Dangers are serious, uncertain, and irreversible
- Climate change is not the only danger
  - How do we set priorities?
  - What principles to use?
    - Maximize expected utility
    - Insurance approach
    - Social justice
- Emissions are today, most damage is far in the future
  - How to balance needs & capabilities of current and future generations?
- Partisan Gridlock
  - The ideal policy may not be politically possible
  - Second-best or third-best policies may be more easily enacted
  - Are there effective ways to build agreement across the partisan divide?